



SECRETARY'S MESSAGE TO VA RESEARCH COMMUNITY

Transcript of a June 2003 video presentation by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi

A hallmark of VA health care is our systematic approach to linking research and practice to the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of deployment-related illnesses. Our efforts to understand illnesses associated with force deployments during the Gulf War take on new meaning and urgency after the success of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The Department of Defense is taking unparalleled steps to document and follow the health of military personnel returning from Iraq as we step up our research into the illnesses reported by significant numbers of Gulf War veterans.

We know that Gulf War veterans are ill. They suffer from a pattern of health problems that significantly exceed those seen in comparable populations and beyond that explained by stress or psychiatric diagnosis.

Research on Gulf War illnesses and more recent military deployments has broader implications to war on terrorism, as several risk factors are germane to domestic terrorism preparedness, such as chemical agents and medical countermeasures relevant to homeland defense.

Thanks to the work of the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses and VA Research Service, we have doubled the funding available this year to VA investigators for research into Gulf War illnesses and other military deployments. These include large deployments to Bosnia and Kosovo, to Afghanistan, and most recently, Iraq, and smaller, recent deployments, such as to Panama, Haiti, and Somalia.

Now is the time for VA's research community to respond. We want the best researchers and the best ideas brought to bear on deployment health issues. This is an area ripe for important discoveries and I know that we have the people and the program to lead the way.

The results of this ambitious research program will provide useful guidance in improving the medical care of veterans who return from combat, and in improving preventive medicine efforts during future deployments. There are four major research priorities:

1. Long-term health impacts of hazardous deployments, such as the Gulf War, Bosnia/Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.
2. Health impacts of specific military occupational and environmental exposures, such as neurotoxic chemicals and depleted uranium during the Gulf War, or exposure to industrial air pollution in Bosnia and Kosovo.
3. Improvements in diagnosis of deployment related illnesses, such as better neurocognitive testing for memory problems... and
4. Improvements in treatment of deployment related illnesses, such as better treatments for chronic fatigue syndrome and fibromyalgia.

You have the program base, the expertise, the imagination...and now the resources to make a difference in health and science and, most importantly, in the lives of current and future veterans. Here's how to begin...

Go to the VA Research Web site shown here (<http://www.va.gov/resdev/>) and click on "solicitations for research projects." Scroll down to "R&D-wide deployment health issues." That solicitation provides VA Gulf War illnesses research background and guidance, as well as names and phone numbers to contact for more information. I encourage you to read it through, discuss it with your colleagues and join VA's best in finding answers that will serve veterans now and well into the future.

Thank you.